

ACADEMY
OF
NOTRE DAME DE NAMUR

I WAS A HERO FOR A DAY

THE INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORY
BY
COLLEEN ANNE PRENTICE

VILLANOVA, PENNSYLVANIA

APRIL, 1980

19th US Army, 1st B

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PREFACE

The subject of my research project is a seldom-heard -of individual in history. He is my great-great-grandfather, Joseph Rollin Prentice I, who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic deed at the Battle of Stones River, near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, during the Civil War.

In the process of compiling this report, I have, among other things,:

rummaged through numerous attics and basements, spent several days at Freedoms Foundation, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where extensive records of Medal of Honor recipients are housed, (and where the only information on Joseph Rollin Prentice I was a record of his citation),

conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews in homes, hospitals, a government historical site, and a private philanthropic foundation, and

researched United States Military records.

I am proud to be able to write that, to date, what follows is the most complete record of my great-great-grandfather's life ever written. Historians at both Stones River National

Historical Site, and Valley Forge's Freedoms Foundation have requested copies of this report. I shall be pleased and proud to have my work become part of their records.

This project has been, and always will be, a very special one for me, due to the subject I chose. Joseph Rollin Prentice I is one of my main roots. In finding out about him, I am, in a sense, finding out about myself!

Colleen Anne Prentice

April, 1980

Joseph Rollin Prentice I was born on December 6, 1838, in Lancaster, Fairfield County, Ohio, to Elizabeth Eyanson Prentice, and her husband, John Rollin Prentice. Soon after his birth, Joseph and his parents moved to Indiana, where Mr. Prentice set out to become a farmer. Mrs. Prentice's brother, John Eyanson, his wife, and the senior Mr. and Mrs. Eyanson accompanied them to the town of Decater, in Indiana's Adams County. There, the three (3) families settled on adjacent farms.

The second Prentice child, Elizabeth Anne, was born on September 5, 1840. A second son arrived on April 23, 1842, and was promptly named George Nickel. The fourth, and last, Prentice child was named Margaret Elizabeth, after her difficult birth on February 23, 1844.

In 1861, at the outbreak of the Civil War, Joseph, his brother, George, and his uncle, were the only men left to run the three (3) farms, a job which both Joseph and George despised intensely. So, when it had been decided that one (1) of them had to remain at home and continue farming, they flipped a coin to decide which would be the lucky one to go off to war!..

Due to his luck in the coin toss, Joseph Rollin Prentice I entered the Regular Army, from Adams County,

Indiana, in March, 1862, and became a Private in Company E, 19th U. S. Infantry, First Battalion. His hitch was for three (3) years. I have been unable to find any account of the activities of this company previous to the Battle of Stones River, (often referred to as the Battle of Murfreesboro), the site of my great-great-grandfather's valiant deed.

The Battle of Stones River was the major confrontation between Union and Confederate forces, for control of the food-producing area of middle Tennessee. This important battle had two (2) distinct parts, on two (2) different dates, December 31, 1862, and January 2, 1863.

Early on the first day of fighting, the Confederates were driving the Union forces back rapidly. During a period of heavy fire, Major S. D. Carpenter, First Battalion, 19th U. S. Infantry, fell mortally wounded. According to my great-great-grandfather,

... A great cry went up, and a call was made for volunteers to go back for the Major. I ran back and found him. I got him on my back, for he was a heavy man. As I ran back, the enemy kept shooting at us. I felt two bullets strike him while he was on my back. When I got back to our lines, and put him down, he was dead. I was a hero for a day. There was much talk, by the officers, and men, of a medal. But, as time went on, there were other battles....¹

Joseph Rollin Prentice I remained with the Union Army until March, 1865. He was honorably discharged, due to

¹"J. R. Prentice Awarded Medal of Honor", Sabetha News, 15 Feb. 1894, p. 1.

a wound to his left shoulder, (received near Dalton, Georgia), on May 30, 1864! It is interesting to note that his discharge occurred one (1) day before his three (3) year hitch with the Regular Army would have been up.

Upon his return home, my great-great-grandfather came to believe that, because of his injury, he could no longer farm. Thus, he became a cook, for a short period of time, and, later, bought a team of horses and a wagon. With the latter he hauled freight from Sioux City, Iowa to Omaha, Nebraska, and between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sabetha, Kansas. In 1863 he purchased some land near Sabetha. and, soon after, married Hester Lunnar, a widowed mother of two (2) sons. He made his living as a summer farmer and a winter trapper. Four (4) children were born to Hester and Joseph. Sadly, their two (2) sons died in infancy; happily, their two (2) daughters survived.

After Hester's untimely death, Joseph Rollin Prentice I married Margaret Jane Rooney, in August, 1875. This second marriage produced seven (7) children. It was during this period of his life that my great-great-grandfather came into possession of two (2) highly-prized buffalo robes, one of which I have used as the background for the interpretive materials which accompany this paper. According to my grandfather, Joseph Rollin Prentice VI, the Cherokee Indians of Kansas gave my historically-honored ancestor the two (2) robes in exchange for food.

It wasn't until the 1890's, after he was retired, powerful, and wealthy, that my great-great-grandfather inquired, of the War Department, as to the reason why he had never received a battlefield citation, as he had been promised. He found out that all of the officers who would have followed up on this award report had been killed in Civil War battles after Stones River. So, the United States government started an investigation of his claim. They finally unearthed a retired Army general, whose name is unknown at this time, who remembered the incident, and recalled the details. Mostly on the strength of this general's testimony, Joseph Rollin Prentice I was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor on February 3, 1894.

The Congressional Medal of Honor is the highest military award in the United States of America! On July 12, 1862 President Abraham Lincoln had signed, into law, a bill which created this award. It was, and still is, "awarded by the President and presented in the name of Congress"². The Medal of Honor is given to a person "who while a member of the Armed Forces, distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry, at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty.... The deed performed must have been one of personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades, and must have involved risk of life..."³.

²U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Medal of Honor Recipients, 1863-1978. 1979. p.5.

³Ibid., p.6.

Knowing that one (1) of my ancestors was worthy of this honor makes me proud.

My great-great-grandfather died on August 7, 1908, in Blockner Hospital, in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Almost seventy (70) years of age, he was laid to his final rest in " the Catholic cemetery in Hebron, Nebraska"⁴.

As a result of his second marriage, Joseph Rollin Prentice I had two (2) children named after him. In the next generation, four (4) of his grandsons were named Joseph Rollin Prentice. The youngest of these grandsons is my paternal grandfather. My father is Joseph Rollin Prentice VII, and my brother is Joseph Rollin Prentice VIII.

In closing this report, I would like to mention something which is being done, during 1980, for my great-great-grandfather, and all other Medal of Honor recipients. Sister Maria Veronica, I.H.M., will spend this year, as she has the previous ten (10), at Valley Forge's Freedoms Foundation, furthering her research about each, and every, Congressional Medal of Honor winner.

Resultantly, in the small, brick Henry Knox Building, one will continue to be able to find numerous books, medals, photographs, listings, and, generally speaking, everything that is known about the medal, and those who received it. Best of all, at the Freedoms

⁴Interview with Joseph Rollin Prentice VI, telephone between Phoenixville, Pennsylvania and Fairfax County Hospital, Fairfax, Virginia, 2 March 1980.

Foundation, there is a beautifully-maintained Medal of Honor Grove. As the map which I have included among my interpretive materials shows, each of the fifty-two (52) acres is dedicated to a particular state in our great country. It is my feeling that F. O. Clemens best described the Medal of Honor Grove. His quote follows.

...This special area has been landscaped in a design approximating the map of the United States, with each state identified. Several miles of winding paths will connect the fifty-two memorial squares, each containing an Honor Shaft, a permanent obelisk in the design of the Washington Monument. Each state's seal will be attached near the base of the shaft. The names of each state's Medal of Honor recipients will be engraved down the sides.⁵

Where space allows, each recipient has his own tree, usually placed within the acre dedicated to the state in which he enlisted, or was drafted. In front of his tree stands a plaque, on which is engraved the recipient's name, rank, and the date and location of his heroic deed. The interpretive materials accompanying my report include photographs of my great-great-grandfather's Ohio Buckeye tree, his plaque, (which is placed beneath it), the Ohio state obelisk, (with a closeup view of his name on it), and two (2) views of the entire Ohio state area.

Those who have helped me in the preparation of this report are numerous, too numerous to mention individually, lest I forget someone. But, I feel that I must offer some special thanks to two (2) people:

⁵Clemens, F.O., Ohio-Franklin County Medal of Honor Winners (Columbus, Ohio; Library Press, 1968), p.3.

James A. Sanders, Superintendent of the National Historical Park at Stones River, Tennessee, and my grandfather, Joseph Rollin Prentice VI, of Ridge, Maryland, who, at the time of this writing, is still searching for his grandfather's sleigh bells, which the first Joseph Rollin Prentice used to attract customers to his post-Civil-War freight business.

In conclusion, in answer to the question, "Does the individual shape history, or does history shape the individual?", I have gotten the distinct feeling that it is the former. I, Colleen Anne Prentice, definitely feel that my great-great-grandfather helped, in a very tangible way, to shape the history of his, yours, and my country!

CITATION

"Voluntarily rescued the body of his commanding officer, who had fallen mortally wounded. He brought off the field his mortally wounded leader under direct and constant rifle fire."⁶

This citation accompanied the Medal of Honor which was awarded to my great-great-grandfather, on February 3, 1894, by President Grover Cleveland. He did so, in Washington, D.C., in "the name of Congress of the United States of America".⁷

⁶U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Veterans' Affairs. p. 193.

⁷Ibid.

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13. Sister Maria Veronica I.H.M.. Freedoms Foundation, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. History of Medal of Honor Recipients 1863-1978. 1979. Volume 56, p. 2047.
14. U.S. Congress Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Medal of Honor Recipients 1863-1978. 1979. pp. 5,6,193.
15. U.S. Department of the Interior. Stones River. 1979. pp. 5-6.

GUIDE TO INTERPRETIVE MATERIALS - COLLEEN ANNE PRENTICE

1. a. & b. LETTER-from Superintendent Sanders of Stones River National Historical Park...contains much information on my great-great-grandfather....
2. NEWSPAPER ARTICLE- concerning the eleven (11) men who received Medals of Honor at Stones River, and featuring a large picture of J.R.Prentice I....
3. LETTER-from my grandfather, to the staff at Stones River National Historical Park, giving them, on a long-term loan, the Prentice medal and memorabilia....
4. POSTCARD-view of the Stones River Visitors' Center, where my great-great-grandfather's medal is on display....
5. PHOTOGRAPH-of the Joseph Rollin Prentice I Exhibit within the Stones River Visitors' Center....
6. MAP-of the Freedoms Foundation Medal of Honor Grove, with a star indicating the location of the Prentice plaque and tree....
7. LETTER-written by my grandfather, about the first Joseph Rollin Prentice....
8. REPORT-I Was A Hero For A Day is the most complete record of my great-great-grandfather's life which has been compiled to date. Copies of it will become part of the properties of Freedoms Foundation and Stones River National Historical Park.
9. PHOTOGRAPH-of the flag of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society....
10. PHOTOGRAPH-of a picture, drawn by Mr. L. Mingola, of The Medal of Honor....It shows the ancient goddess Minerva expelling discord with a shield of stars and stripes.
11. PHOTOGRAPH-of the Ohio Acre, within the Medal of Honor Grove, shows the Ohio obelisk, and my great-great grandfather's tree....
12. PHOTOGRAPH-This close-up of the Ohio State obelisk shows Yours Truly pointing to my great-great-grandfather's name.

13. PHOTOGRAPH-shows Colleen Anne Prentice beside the Ohio State obelisk, on which Joseph Rollin Prentice I's name is engraved in bronze....
14. PHOTOGRAPH-of the Ohio Acre in the Freedoms Foundation's Medal of Honor Grove....The Prentice tree is slightly to the left of the large pine tree on this picture's far left.
15. PHOTOGRAPH-shows my great-great-grandfather's tree and plaque, located in Valley Forge's Freedoms Foundation Medal of Honor Grove.
16. PHOTOGRAPH-Prentice's tree, the state tree of Ohio, buckeye, is shown here.
17. LETTER- from a historian at Stones River National Historical Park....
18. QUOTE-This is a copy, courtesy of the Stones River N.H.P. staff, of Joseph Rollin Prentice I's account of his meritorious actions.
19. PHOTOGRAPH-This picture of the Prentice display at Stones River N.H.P. places emphasis on the 1894 photograph of my famous ancestor.
20. BUFFALO ROBE-This treasured family heirloom was given to my great-great-grandfather, by the Cheyenne Indians, in exchange for food.
21. PHOTOGRAPH- shows Joseph Rollin Prentice I at the age of fifty-six (56). My grandfather resembles him greatly!
22. STATEMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL-contains plans, and reasons, for Stones River N.H.P., a division of the United States Department of the Interior, to acquire the adjoining remainder of the land on which any part of the Civil War battle took place. As of 9:00 p.m., May 26, 1980 Congress was acting favorably toward this request. (Information received from Superintendent Sanders, via telephone.)
23. PHOTOGRAPHS-My most recent acquisitions were mailed to me, at Georgetown University, by Stones River N.H.P. historians. They are photos of a photo, newly-discovered in Tennessee, of Joseph Rollin Prentice I in his military uniform. He looks so proud!